

ADDICTION

Counseling Guide

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

A simple definition of addiction is the persistent, compulsive use of a substance or engagement in an activity that is known by the user to be harmful in some way.

To be more specific, addiction is a condition that results from a compulsive need for and/or use of a habit-forming substance (e.g. alcohol, drugs, nicotine) or engaging in an activity (e.g. sex, shopping, viewing pornography, gambling) that feels pleasurable to the user. This compulsive need is characterized by tolerance and by physiological or psychological symptoms during withdrawal.

TYPES OF ADDICTION

A commonly held belief is that addiction primarily deals with drugs and alcohol; however, addiction encompasses much more. As stated in the definition, addiction is the result of using substances or engaging in activities that are habit-forming.

Not all types of addictions develop as the result of negative behaviors, such as substance abuse. Some addictions may result from what are considered positive behaviors, such as excessive exercise. Addictions to positive or acceptable behaviors can be more difficult to identify. Regardless of whether behaviors are considered to be positive or negative, these actions cause the brain to release powerful chemicals called endorphins which allow individuals to feel pleasure, resulting in powerful reinforcement of the excessive behavior or activity.

COMMON ADDICTIONS

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Drugs (both illicit and prescription)
- Pornography (and other sexual addictions)
- Gambling
- Video Games
- Internet
- Social Media
- Food
- Work
- Shopping

WHO IS AFFECTED BY ADDICTION?

Addiction can happen to *anyone* regardless of age, cultural background, or socioeconomic status. Addiction is a repetitive process that is often used to distract individuals from feeling discomfort, pain, stress, trauma, etc.

FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND THE WORKPLACE

Addictions can seriously affect a person's relationships, health, and career. People who have developed an addiction may not be aware that their compulsive behavior is out of control and causing problems for themselves and others. Over time, addictions will interfere with ordinary responsibilities and concerns and have a negative impact on one's life.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY ADDICTION? (CONTINUED)

GENETICS

Extensive research has been done on the relationship between addiction and genetics. Studies have shown that some people have a genetic predisposition to addiction. For example, as seen in families where there is a long family history of alcoholism. Not every person who struggles with an addiction is genetically predisposed, but it is important to explore the individual's personal and family history.

HOW IS ADDICTION IDENTIFIED?

The line between enjoyment and addiction can sometimes be a fine one. There are some instances in which addiction is harder to define due to the activity. For example, watching Netflix, using social media, shopping, going to the gym, or playing video games are all acceptable activities that have the potential for becoming addictive. However, since these behaviors do not involve chemical substances, addiction can be more difficult to identify. The following guidelines can be used to help determine the severity of substance-based addictions as well as addictive behaviors:

1. IMPORTANCE:

How important has the substance or activity become to the individual? Importance can be determined not only by how often the individual uses the substance or engages in the activity, but also by how much the individual is *not* doing other things. *Priority determines importance.*

2. REWARD RESPONSE:

Does using the substance or engaging in the activity make the individual feel better or more in control? Does not doing it make the person feel worse? Doing enjoyable things helps people feel better while avoiding unenjoyable things can have the same effect (at least initially). There is a strong correlation between these kinds of activities, which can make the negative consequences more difficult to recognize.

HOW IS ADDICTION IDENTIFIED? (CONTINUED)

3. PREVALENCE:

How often does the individual engage in the activity or use the substance? The person may begin to devote more and more time for these activities while sacrificing time for other important things in life.

4. CESSATION:

The individual may begin to feel anxious or uncomfortable if he/she cannot have the substance or engage in the activity. One way to gauge how important these things have become is to ask the person to consider how he/she would feel without them. The initial emotion or physical response can be very telling.

5. DISRUPTION:

Does using the substance or engaging in the activity disrupt the individual's life and relationships? One's life could be compared to a drawer full of files. There is only so much space in the drawer. Every time a file called "Instagram" or "Netflix" or "Video Games" is added, folders must be moved to provide more room in the drawer. The preexisting files may be labeled "God," "Sleep," "Family," "Work," "School," or "Relationships." Some of the files may not be fun; they are thick and heavy and take up a great deal of space, but some are beautiful and filled with joy. The more new files one tries to pack into the drawer, the more pressure is placed on the things and people already there.

6. TOLERANCE:

The individual may find him/herself needing more of a substance or spending increased time engaging in an activity. This concept is most commonly associated with drugs and alcohol, but can apply to other addictions as well. The brain and body become accustomed to a certain dose, amount of time, etc. of the substance or activity. People can start to have a decreased response to a certain amount and will require some form of increase in order to maintain the desired response.

7. REVERTING:

Individuals may make the decision to change (stop using a substance or engaging in an activity), but then turn around and continue doing the same thing, or doing it even more. If the individual has already made room in his/her file drawer for something fun and pleasurable, or at least distracting, just thinking about depriving oneself of it brings up numerous rationales and reasons why "right now" is just not the best time to stop.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ADDICTION?

There is a plethora of addictions faced today that are not addressed in the Bible. The Bible is clear that God prohibits drunkenness (i.e. 1 Peter 4:3, Proverbs 23:29-35), and this can help us understand God's heart toward other addictions. We do this by understanding *why* drunkenness is prohibited. The end of Proverbs 23 says that "your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind will imagine confusing things" (NIV). The ESV is similar, but ends the verse with "and your heart will utter perverse things." It is made clear here that drunkenness can confuse our thoughts, weaken our inhibitions, and make us more vulnerable to sin. The same could be said of almost any substance or drug when it is abused.

OUR BODY IS A TEMPLE

Our body is a temple. We are instructed to honor God with our bodies, since our bodies are given to us by God. Paul condemns sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6 and he plainly explains that we are not our own. God's desire is for us to honor Him, and one of the ways we can do this is to take care of the bodies and minds He has given us.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/addiction>

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<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hope-relationships/201411/6-signs-youre-addicted-something>

<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/drug+tolerance>